



Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

Nomination for the 2025 Prize

Gene Luen Yang

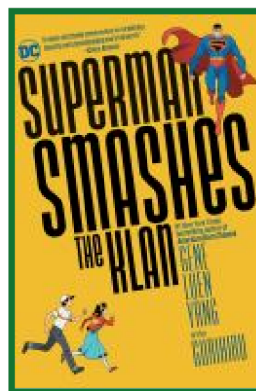
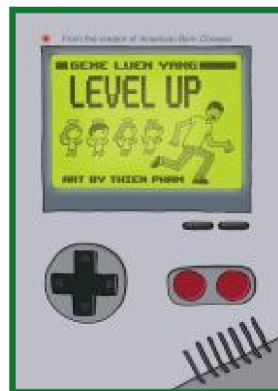
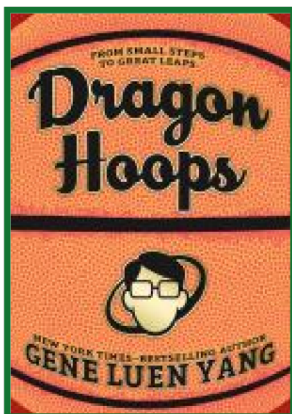
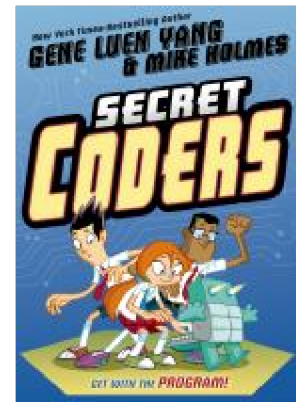
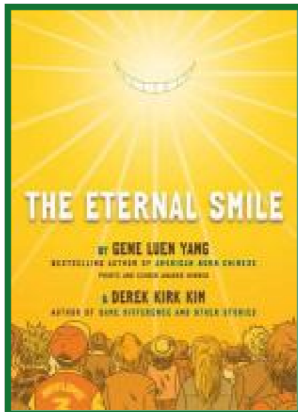
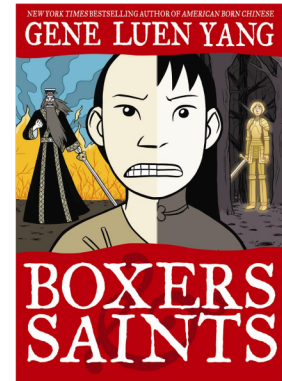
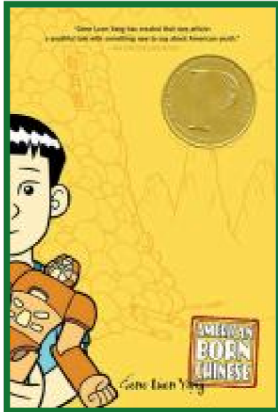
United States Board on Books for Young People

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Grounds for Nomination

From the groundbreaking 2006 publication of *American Born Chinese*, Gene Luen Yang has used graphic novels to illuminate aspects of Asian American identity, balancing the universal and the specific with exquisite care. As the US National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, he urged children to “read without walls”—exploring new topics and formats, and most importantly, characters “who do[n’t] look like you or live like you”—a campaign in perfect communion with the spirit of Astrid Lindgren.



Brief Biography

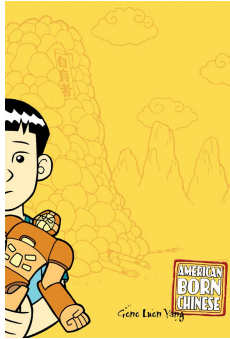


The son of Chinese immigrants, Yang grew up in California and was always one of a small Asian American minority in school. He fell in love with comic books in the fifth grade, a passion that led him to want to study art in college. Encouraged by his parents to choose a more practical field, he studied computer science. After a brief career as a computer programmer, Yang turned to education, teaching computer science at the high school level while making comics in his spare time. It was while he was substituting for an algebra teacher that he realized the medium he loved could have a tremendous impact on his students' learning.

Yang's first traditionally published book, *American Born Chinese*, was the first graphic novel to win the Printz Award for young adult literature and to be nominated for the U.S. National Book Award. His subsequent graphic novels—some illustrated by Yang, some illustrated by others—have explored magical realism, fantasy, historical fiction, romance, and memoir. Through these varied lenses he has consistently celebrated the complexity of Asian American identity while breaking down stereotypes.

His creative daring and his respect for young readers won him both a 2016 MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and a term as National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. In the latter capacity, he encouraged youngsters to "read without walls" by exploring new topics and embracing new formats, and, most importantly, by reading "about a character who doesn't look like you or live like you." In 2023, he won the N.S.K. Neustadt Prize for children's and young adult literature, and he currently serves on the board of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, a nonprofit organization dedicated to defending the free-speech rights of both creators and readers.

Three Prominent Works



American Born Chinese

Colored by Lark Pien

First Second, 2006

In his Printz Award–winning graphic novel, Yang twines three apparently disparate storylines: that of the Monkey King of Chinese cosmology, who hates himself and wreaks havoc in seeking transformation; Chinese American high school student Jin Wang, who is one of very few Asian students in his school; and Danny, a 16-year-old white boy who is mortified by his visiting cousin Chin-Kee, who embodies negative anti-Chinese stereotypes. Readers understand that Jin and

Danny are one and the same, Danny representing Jin’s desire to fit in with his white classmates and Chin-Kee his acute awareness of both his difference and his classmates’ bigotry. Yang’s illustrations elicit uncomfortable cringes with his caricatures of both the buck-toothed, queue-sporting Chin-Kee and Danny’s blond curls and Ken-doll look. All together, the three storylines lead readers through a brilliant exploration of Chinese American minority identity.

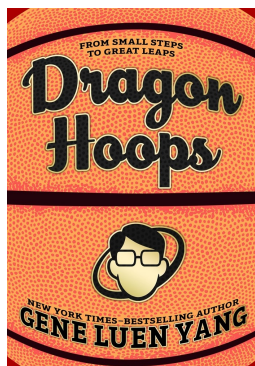


The Shadow Hero

Illustrated by Sonny Liew; lettered by Janice Chiang

First Second, 2014

With this title, Yang explores the origin story of the Green Turtle, a short-lived superhero from World War II–era comic books created by a Chinese American cartoonist, Chu F. Hing. Yang probes the restrictions imposed by both Chu’s publisher and a bigoted public, teasing from Chu’s hints (the Green Turtle’s face is never shown, for instance) a fully Chinese American superhero. Within Yang’s reimagining, teenager Hank Chu’s adventures are both funny (his superhero career is his mother’s idea) and provocative, as Yang explores and punctures both superhero and racist tropes while delivering a smart, satisfying, and—this is a Golden Age comic book, after all—appropriately pulpy plot.



Dragon Hoops

Colored by Lark Pien

First Second, 2020

Here Yang turns from fiction to a combination of narrative nonfiction and memoir, as he chronicles one season of the Bishop O’Dowd High School boys’ basketball team. A teacher at Bishop O’Dowd at the time, Yang had no real interest in the sport but found in the team and its coach—a former student player—a compelling story nevertheless. His account brings plenty of basketball action but also sensitively incorporates his own mid-life career crisis (should he continue teaching or commit to comics full time?) and his conflicting feelings about whether and how to introduce a secondary character, a former coach who was dismissed due to allegations of sexual abuse but never tried. Balancing sports action and adult introspection, Yang delivers an exhilarating read.

Select Bibliography

(ordered from most recent to oldest; Yang is illustrator unless otherwise indicated;
international publication information included where available)

Lunar New Year Love Story . Illustrated by LeUyen Pham. First Second, 2024.

UK/Commonwealth: Macmillan, 2024.

Rights also sold in Brazil, France, Israel, Italy, Poland, Spain.

Dragon Hoops . Colored by Lark Pien. First Second, 2020.

Italy: Tunué, 2020.

Superman Smashes the Klan . Illustrated by Gurihiru; lettered by Janice Chiang. DC Comics, 2020.

France: *Superman écrase le Klan* . Urban Comics, 2020.

Japan: スーパーマン・スマッシュ・ザ・クラン / *Sūpāman sumasshu za kuran*.

Translated by Yoshikawa Yū. Shōgakukanshūeishapurodakushon, 2020.

Spain. *Superman contra el Klan* . Translated by Fernando Refoyo Romero. Kodomo, 2023.

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France: *Les codeurs de l'ombre: Demandez le programme!* 404 éditions, 2017

Korea: 시 크릿 코더 / *Sikeulis kodeo* . Gilbut, 2016.

Russia: *Тайные кодеры / Taīnye kodery* . Translated by Sergey Averin. #èksmodetstvo, 2018.

Taiwan: 程式特攻隊 / *Cheng shi te gong dui* . Global Kids Books, 2018.

The Shadow Hero . Illustrated by Sonny Liew; lettered by Janice Chiang. First Second, 2014.

China: 影子侠 / *Ying zi xia* . Translated by Lu Xingyu yi. Gingko, 2018.

France: Urban Comics, 2016.

United Arab Emirates: / *Ba ṭal al-ṣil* . Translated by Mu'tazz Ḥ asānayn & Aḥmad Ṣ alāḥ al- Maḥdī. Kalimat Group, 2018.

Boxers and Saints . Colored by Lark Pien. First Second, 2013.

France: *Boxeurs & Saints* . Delcourt, 2015.

Korea: 의 화단 / *Ŭihwadan* & 의 화단 : 소녀의 전쟁 : 모든 전쟁에는 두 개의

얼굴이 있다 / *uihwadan : sonyeoui jeonjaeng : modeun jeonjaeng-eneun du gaeui eolgul-i issda* . Translated by Söng-hun Yun. Viabook, 2014.

Turkey: *Boksörler & Azizler* . Translated by Nazlıcan Saltan. Alfa, 2020.

Level Up. Illustrated by Thien Pham. First Second, 2011.

Prime Baby. Colored by Derek Kirk Kim. First Second, 2010.

The Eternal Smile. Illustrated by Derek Kirk Kim. First Second, 2009.

France: Le sourire éternel. Dargaud, 2010.

Indonesia: Senyum abadi : tiga cerita. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010.

American Born Chinese. Colored by Lark Pien. First Second, 2006.

Brazil: O chinês americano. Translated by Beth Veira. Cia Das Letras, 2017

China: 美生中国人 / Mei sheng zhong guo ren. Shaanxi Normal University Press, 2008.

Czechia: Američan čínského původu. BB/art, 2008.

France: Histoire d'un Chinois d'Amérique. Dargaud, 2007.

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Korea: 진과대니 : 그래픽노블 / Jin kwa Daeni. Viabook, 2008.

Norway: Amerikansk kineser. Translated by Jens Erik Røsåsen. Egmont seriefordl, 2008.

Spain: Chino americano. La Cupula Ediciones, 2007.

UK/Commonwealth: Macmillan, 2006.

Nominee's Contact Information

Website:

<https://geneyang.com/>

Books to Be Sent to Jury

American Born Chinese

Boxers and Saints

Dragon Hoops

The Eternal Smile

Level Up

Lunar New Year Love Story

Secret Coders

The Shadow Hero

Superman Smashes the Klan

Supporting Information Honors & Prizes

Listed in reverse chronological order, with specific books indicated where appropriate. Links are to the appropriate URL.

- 2023 [N.S.K. Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature](#)
- 2021 [Michael L. Printz Honor](#) for Excellence in Young Adult Literature for *Dragon Hoops*
- 2021 [Eisner Award for Best Publication for Kids](#) for *Superman Smashes the Klan*
- 2021 [Eisner Award for Best Publication for Teens](#) for *Dragon Hoops*
- 2021 [Eisner Award for Best Adaptation from Another Medium](#) for *Superman Smashes the Klan*
- 2016-17 [National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)
- 2016 [MacArthur Fellow](#)
- 2016 [Mathical Book Prize](#) for *Secret Coders*
- 2015 [Eisner Award for Best Writer](#) for *The Shadow Hero* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
- 2015 [Asian/Pacific American Librarians' Association Award for Young Adult Literature, Honor](#) , for *The Shadow Hero*
- 2014 [Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor, Fiction](#) , for *Boxers and Saints*
- 2013 [National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Finalist](#) , for *Boxers and Saints*
- 2012 [Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, Honor](#) , for *Level Up*
- 2007 [Michael L. Printz Award](#) for Excellence in Young Adult Literature for *American Born Chinese*
- 2007 [Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album—New](#) for *American Born Chinese*
- 2006 [National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Finalist](#) , for *American Born Chinese*

Notable Speeches

Listed in reverse chronological order. Links are to the full text where available.

From the [2023 N.S.K. Neustadt Prize](#)

[Lecture](#) Norman, Oklahoma — 25 October

2023 “Do what you love and the love will follow.

“Let me explain.

“[B]y making comic books, I gained a much deeper appreciation of the medium of comics. Now when I read comic books and graphic novels, that experience is richer.

“This is why it's important to teach our children how to write and paint and make music even if they don't ever want to be professional authors or artists or musicians. When you learn to practice an art form, it deepens your appreciation for it, which in turn deepens your appreciation for human expression.”

From the [National Ambassador Inauguration Ceremony](#) Washington, D.C. — 7 January 2016

“Let me end by encouraging you to read without walls. Find a book with someone on the cover who doesn't look like you or live like you. Find a book about a topic that you don't know much about. Find a book that's in a format you've never tried before: a graphic novel, a words-only novel, or a novel in verse.

“Read without walls and see what happens.

“I bet it'll be something amazing.”

From the 2014 [National Book Festival Gala](#) Washington, D.C. — 29 August 2014

“We have to allow ourselves the freedom to make mistakes, including cultural mistakes, in our first drafts. I believe it's okay to get cultural details wrong in your first

draft. It's okay if stereotypes emerge. It just means that your experience is limited, that you're human.

"Just make sure you iron them out before the final draft....

"[L]et's say you do your best. You put in all the effort you can. But then when your book comes out, the Internet gets angry. You slowly realize that, for once, the Internet might be right. You made a cultural misstep. If this happens, take comfort in the fact that even flawed characters can inspire. Apologize if necessary, resolve to do better, and move on.

"Let your fear drive you to do your homework. But no matter what, don't ever let your fear stop you."

2007 Printz Award Acceptance Speech Washington, D.C. — 25 June 2007

I've had a pretty amazing year. And really, that's an understatement. Two years ago, I photocopied and stapled individual chapters of *American Born Chinese* to sell by the dozen at comic book conventions, usually to personal friends or my mom. Today, I'm standing here in front of you.

Along the way from there to here, I've had the privilege of talking to many, many librarians and teachers about why graphic novels belong in our libraries and classrooms. Without exception, my message has been met with unbridled enthusiasm. There's no doubt about it. Librarians love graphic novels.

This past March, however, while I was still enjoying the afterglow of the Printz committee phone call, I began having serious self-doubts. I thought back to an incident from a few years ago, when one of my students, an aspiring rap musician, gave me a copy of his album, I brought it home and played it. Though I found most of it incomprehensible, I thought it had a good beat. The next day in class I told him I liked it, and immediately his friend remarked, "Dude, Mr. Yang is a teacher. If he likes it, it must kinda suck."

This past March, after reflecting on this and many other similar experiences, I came to the slow realization that we adults who work with teenagers—we teachers and librarians—simply are not that cool. And really, the cooler we try to be, the more uncool we become. If you doubt me, try wearing a backwards baseball cap and sagging, extra-large jeans to work some time and take a good, hard look at the faces of the teenagers you serve. You will not find admiration, I assure you.

I began to wonder; by going from library to library and school to school evangelizing librarians and teachers on the virtues of graphic novels, was I robbing comics of their cool? Would a teenager stop reading graphic novels as soon as her classroom teacher or local librarian suggested that she start reading them for her own educational benefit?

Then a month later, something happened that completely shifted my perspective. MySpace honored *American Born Chinese* with the dubious distinction of being their April 2007 featured book. What followed was a furious online discussion about my graphic novel among MySpace users. Although there were occasional nuggets of wisdom, the vast majority of the posts made me regret ever putting my inking brush to paper. Let me share some examples with you.

Post #1: Funnay, this book looks totally awesome, I know ppl who pee in Cokes and eat dead cats. Ba-haha

Post #2: RACIST BOOK, repost if u got any AzN pride, its practically racist against AzNz, even the dude's name is CHINK-kee and all dat s_____. go to dis site and Place Bad comments, Destroy this son of a b_____ book! Destroy it! Destroy it! Racist son of a b_____ book!

Post #3; Shut up, its funny, leave it alone, ur mad cuz u aren't funny, ur just asian and not funny. Funny asians are better

Post #4: i think its funny hes making fun of chinks

Post #5: Heh. people still read books?

Before I went and burned my drawing table, I decided to compare these posts to posts from other online discussions on *American Born Chinese*. These other discussions took place on the Web sites of libraries and schools, and were guided by librarians and teachers. A few examples:

Post #1: I had heard about stereotypes, but never really fully understood them. This book has taught me to at least get a little grasp on the pain and hurt that stereotypes can really cause.

Post #2: It is important to know everything about yourself.... It's important because knowing yourself allows you to see more clearly what you want, who you consider as friends, where you want to go, how you want to live, and what you really care about. That stuff matters.

Post #3: Sometimes we choose to give up certain values or things that we believe in to get to a certain position. Part of who you are may get lost.... But you can always choose to get your soul back.

Post #4; [I] didn't want to be a person who had ADHD, I wanted to be normal and I kept trying to find a way to do it, I searched for a few years, but couldn't find a way to do it. Finally, I guess I just had to accept just who and what I was. Unfortunately, this urge still comes to me once in a great while.

Afterwards, I had an epiphany. In a data-rich society like twenty-first-century America, we need information experts to prevent complex ideas from condensing into polarized, essentially meaningless sound bites. We need these experts to teach us to sort good information from bad. We need them to save us from being drowned by the torrents of media we create. We need them to model for us how to think about what we read and watch and listen to. In short, my epiphany can be summed up like this: You librarians are all that stand in the way of the entire world turning into one big, no-holds-barred MySpace discussion board.

I suddenly appreciated how lucky I am to be able to count librarians among the most ardent supporters of *American Born Chinese*. My Cousin Chin-Kee character, especially, has the potential to be reduced to nothing more than a YouTube video clip in the mind of the reader. Now, it's okay for you to find him funny, but I want you to laugh at him with a knot in your stomach. Without at least a passing knowledge of Chin-Kee's historical roots, a young reader might not develop that knot.

To empower you to make knots in the stomachs of teenagers across the nation, I'd like to take some time now to deconstruct the Cousin Chin-Kee character with you. Chin-Kee stars in one of the three storylines in *American Born Chinese*.

With Chin-Kee, I attempt to tie today's popular images of Asians and Asian-Americans with the more overtly racist imagery prevalent in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Here is a political cartoon from the 1880s, around the time the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted.

Cartoons like this sanctioned discrimination and violence against early Asian American communities. It is from here that Chin-Kee got his outfit and hair style.

My next example shares something in common with one of my favorite spandexed crimefighters. Batman began in a comic book series called *Detective Comics*, DC Comics' flagship title. Few people know, however, that *Detective Comics* did not begin

with Batman. In fact, twenty-six issues of the series were published before Batman reared his brooding, pointy-eared head. The inaugural issue of *Detective Comics* featured a character much more familiar and marketable to comic book readers in the 1930s.

This is Ching Lung, a cheap Fu Manchu knock-off. From him Chin-Kee inherited his leering eyes and menacing slouch.

Those are the origins of Chin-Kee's appearance. His words and actions are much more modern. One of Chin-Kee's most over-the-top lines is a word-for-word quotation from a political cartoon by an award-winning, nationally syndicated cartoonist. In a lunchroom scene in the sixth chapter of *American Born Chinese*, Chin-Kee offers Danny a bite of his "crispy fried cat gizzards with noodles." On April 9, 2001, in response to the Chinese spy plane crisis, American political cartoonist Pat Oliphant drew a six-panel strip depicting Uncle Sam's visit to a Chinese restaurant, where he is served "crispy fried cat gizzards with noodles" by a slant-eyed, bucktoothed waiter.

Chin-Kee's lust for buxom American girls mirrors that of Long Duk Dong, Oriental comic relief in John Hughes' 1984 film *Sixteen Candles*. Most Asian American men of my generation can vividly recall the sting of this character. In a strip drawn for *Giant Robot* magazine, Adrian Tomine, a fellow thirtysomething Asian American cartoonist, recounts his phone interview with Gedde Watanabe, the actor who portrayed Long Duk Dong. Tomine doesn't just speak for himself when he ends the strip with an emphatic, "I hate that f***ingguy!"

Since the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, America has generally acknowledged that Fu Manchu and other historical caricatures of Asians and Asian Americans are racist. But what do we make of modern-day stereotypes? Often these are treated as little more than impolite jokes. After all, Asians and Asian Americans are largely seen as successful in American society.

Images, however, have power. And images have history. Today's depictions of Asians and Asian Americans rest on a tradition. They draw on visual cues and shorthands already established in the mind of the audience. When we encounter John Hughes' Long Duk Dong or Pat Oliphant's Chinese waiter, we must remember who their grandfathers are. And we must ensure that the next generation does the same.

Getting the next generation to read and watch and listen with all their minds and all their hearts is no small task. Generation Next is constantly tempted to communicate through ten-letter text messages, make snap judgments based on two-minute video clips, and understand the world through a rotating set of Yahoo! homepage headlines,

all the while having more information at their fingertips than was available to all previous generations combined. Whether you realized it or not, when you got your librarian's degree and chose to work with teenagers, you enlisted yourself in the frontlines of this struggle.

So am I robbing graphic novels of all their cool by this very act of presenting to a group of librarians? That really isn't the right question. Instead, I should ask, "Can graphic novels—and all young adult literature, really—nurture thought, passion, and understanding within our young people?" I believe the answer is yes, as long as librarians are at their side, encouraging them to not just laugh at the funny scenes and cry at the sad ones, but examine what's behind their laughter and their tears.

I'd like to end by extending my gratitude to the people who made this possible. One does not go from photocopying and stapling comics by hand to making speeches in front of audiences like this one all by himself. First, I thank God for His many blessings upon me and my family, I thank my wife for her infinite patience and love, and my two children for just being cute. I thank my parents for instilling in me a love of stories, and my brother for sharing in the habit of comic book collecting.

To my fellow cartoonists, especially those in the Bay Area alternative comics scene, and most especially Derek Kirk Kim and Lark Pien, thank you for inspiring me to be a better storyteller, for opening doors, and for partnering with me in so many ways. To Mark Siegel, Simon Boughton, Lauren Wohl, Gina Gagliano, Danica Novgorodoff, Kat Kopit, and the rest of the First Second team, thank you for your vision, your passion for excellence, and your elbow grease. I cannot tell you how lucky I am to be published by such an amazing outfit. To my agent Judy Hansen, thank you for reading and explaining to me all that fine print I find so tedious.

And finally, I thank all of you here at the Young Adult Library Services Association. Thank you for the honor of this award. Thank you for your enthusiastic support of my graphic novel. And thank you for developing the intelligent, passionate, insightful readership for whom it is such a pleasure to write and draw.

Praise

Listed in reverse chronological order. Links are to the full text.

“Almost everyone who reads *American Born Chinese* , Gene Luen Yang's groundbreaking graphic novel, is a little afraid of Chin-Kee.

“The book is a classic of young-adult literature, threading together stories of Asian American boyhood with a revered Ming dynasty novel. Chin-Kee's role in it is a small one, but he is the bomb at the book's heart.”

— [New York Times Magazine profile of Gene Luen Yang, 24 May 2023](#)

“ Yang has crafted a triumphant, telescopic graphic memoir that explores the effects of legacy and the power of taking a single first step, no matter the outcome.”

— [Publishers Weekly on Dragon Hoops , January 2020](#)

“ The book may not tell Asian-Americans anything they don't know, but it's the familiarity and specificity of this story in my hands, in print, in the English language that excite me. Since our ancestors immigrated to this country, these narratives have usually been left to oral history or crudely caricatured .”

— [Eddie Huang in the New York Times on The Shadow Hero, 31 August 2014](#)

“ This tour de force fearlessly asks big questions about culture, faith, and identity and refuses to offer simple answers.”

— [Kirkus Reviews on Boxers & Saints , 15 August 2013](#)

“ Yang accomplishes the remarkable feat of practicing what he preaches with this book: accept who you are and you'll already have reached out to others.”

— [Publishers Weekly on American Born Chinese , June 2006](#)

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